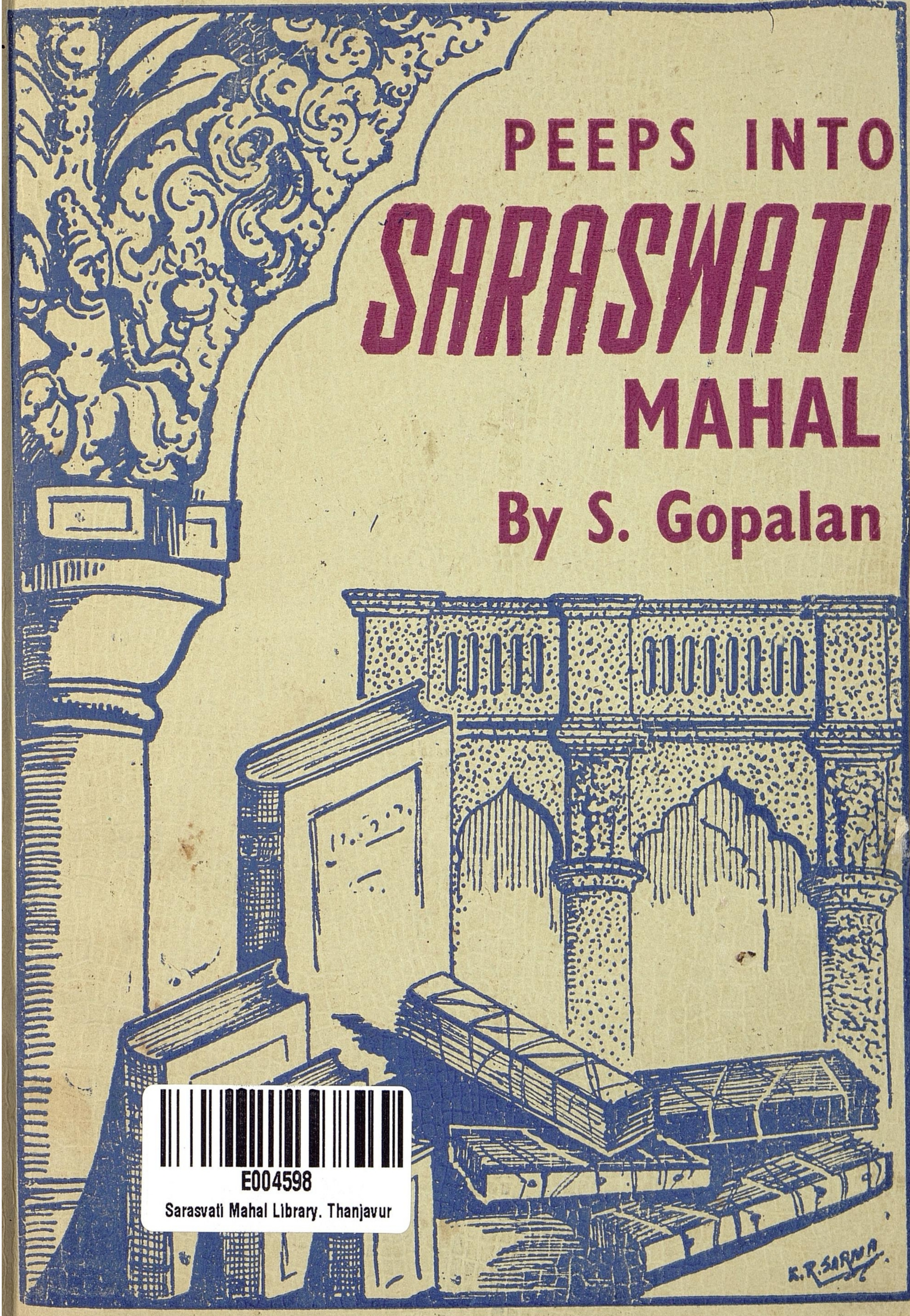
# PEEPS INTO SARASWATI MAHAL

By S. Gopalan




E004598
Sarasvati Mahal Library. Thanjavur

# PEEPS INTO SARASWATI MAHAL

### WITH A SHORT ACCOUNT OF

# THE HISTORY OF THANJAVUR

*By*

**S. GOPALAN,** B.A., B.L.,

*Formerly Hony. Secretary, Saraswati Mahal Library, Thanjavur.*

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# PEEPS
## INTO
# SARASWATI MAHAL
## WITH A SHORT ACCOUNT OF
# THE HISTORY OF TANJORE

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Wonders of the world are more than seven! The Saraswati Mahal Library in Tanjore is one of them.

It is not easy to say all about it in a short compass. It is easier to start by saying what it is not. It is not a mere museum of antiquarian interest, a mere relic of the past or a mere repository of ancient knowledge or quaint wisdom.

It is, first and foremost, an institution of vital interest to us in the present, a fit centre of research in History, Music, Medicine and Science, a voyage in realms of gold for the man of letters. It is a valued possession of the South of India preserved in trust for the whole of India, and ultimately for the benefit of the world.

It is the product of the synthesis of three different cultures, the result of the fusion and mutual adjustment of three different influences, the Tamilian Cholas, the Telugu Nayaks, and the Maharashtras, finally enriched by the impact of the West.

## The Historical Background

Before we peep into the Saraswati Mahal, we must know something of the influenee that shaped it, the background from which it emerged. This background is nothing less than the whole history of Tanjore.

The earliest rulers of Tanjore known to history are the Mutharayars, who ruled from their capital at Sendalai, a fertile village near Tirukattupalli in Tanjore District. But few details of their times are available except that in the middle of the ninth century they were a dependency under the Pallava rulers, when the great Chola King, Vijayalaya, knocked Tanjore off their hands and made it his capital.

What a fascinating name is that of the Cholas ! They occupy a tremendous space in the history of our country. They were powerful rulers of the South in the epic past, the contemporaries of the Pandavas. They were potent rulers much earlier than 250 B. C. as is clear from the famous pillars of ASHOKA which refer to them. They were a dynasty of Kings who prevailed for at least 2000 years, leaders of phenomenal greatness rearing their heads among them now and then like tall peaks, until the end of the 13th century.

The period of the Cholas was productive of immortal works in Tamil literature. It is no wonder that Tanjore which was the seat of some of the greatest Chola Kings, came to be the repository of some of these priceless works.

After the Cholas came the Nayaks.

Various chieftains calling themselves Cholas ruled for some time till, about the end of the 14th century, the Vijayanagar Emperors annexed Cholamandalam to their Kingdom. They ruled

Tanjore through their Viceroys. One of the Viceroys appointed in 1532 by Emperor Achyuta was Sevappa Nayak and he founded the dynasty of Tanjore Nayak Kings.

All the Nayak Kings were, without exception, great men of letters. Their queens were gifted writers. Their ministers were famous scholars and poets. In their court flourished both Sanskrit and Telugu poets and dramatists. The Telugu and Sanskrit works produced during the rule of the Nayaks from 1532 to 1673 are in the archives of the Saraswati Mahal and are hailed as classics.

From the Nayaks, Tanjore passed into the hands of the Marathas in the year 1674. Ekoji, brother of Shivaji the Great, became ruler. He was followed by a succession of Maratha Kings who were devoted to arts and letters. They were most of them multilinguists and encouraged Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit and Marathi. The Saraswati Mahal was developed and equipped by the great Maratha King Serfoji, after whom the library is rightly named. Many are the literary legacies of this period and they are not the least conspicuous of the cherished possessions of the Saraswati Mahal.

It was during the days of the later Marathas, chiefly Raja Tulaja and his adopted son Raja Serfoji, that English and French arts and letters provided the finishing touches to the grand cultural and literary picture drawn by the hand of centuries.

A detailed account of the story of Tanjore from the days of the Cholas to the decline and fall of the Maratha Kingdom in 1855, is set forth in the Appendix.

Now, we have an idea of the great historic forces that made for the Saraswati Mahal. Let us now peep into the Library.

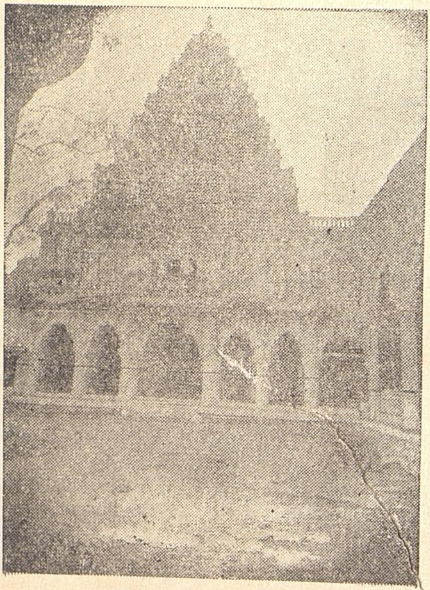
But not yet.........

**A Peep into the Library**

Outside the Library, across the open space, stands a life-size marble statue, attractively set up in an imposing hall. The statue is that of Maharaja Serfoji. It was set up there in his life-time in 1807, by the East India Company. It is the work of Flaxman, a famous sculptor. It faces the Library with folded hands in the traditional Indian style. It is said that at the express request of the King, the original military pose, with sword drawn, was altered into this attitude of lasting salutation to Saraswati.

The statue stands on a granite pedastal, a single slab, black and highly polished, measuring $18\frac{1}{2}' \times 16\frac{1}{2}'$. It is a legacy of the Nayak Kings.

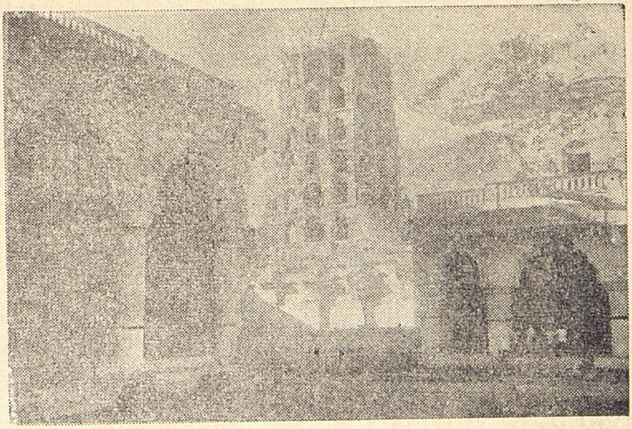
The hall in which the statue stands is well-known as the Nayak Durbar Hall, a structure of the 16th century. It has peculiar acoustic qualities and from here one's voice could be heard without difficulty beyond a distance of three hundred yards.



*Arsenal Tower*

Now, walking back from the statue hall to the Library, we see the ancient arsenal tower, on one side, and on the other, the watch-tower where they had an instrument to record accurate time.

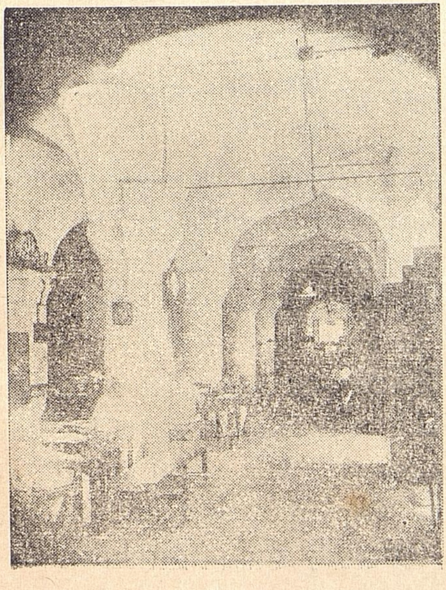
The open ground between the statue hall and the Library with the arsenal tower and the watchtower brooding over the scene presents a picturesque setting.



*The watch-tower with the Art Gallery on either side*

The statue hall, the Pooja hall of the Nayak Kings on the northern side and the Hall at the base of Arsenal Tower are at present the seat of the Tanjore Art Gallery.

Walking into the Library, we are first hushed into a reverent attitude. This is partly due to the great name of the Saraswati Mahal but especially to the aura that surrounds it. It is housed in a peculiarly appropriate hall built in the times of the Nayaks.



Many of the buildings we see in Tanjore are either the work of the Cholas or the Nayaks. The Marathas were greater fighters than builders but they knew the value of art and, but for their artistic sense, many of the buildings in Tanjore would have turned to ruins long ago.

There are a good many things in the Library which impress us with its antiquity. The huge wooden almirahs in which the books and manuscripts are kept, have been in existence for some centuries. At the northern end of the Library, huge wooden shelves of ancient make contain the printed English books, collected by Maharaja Serfoji. In each book we find the autograph of this great scholar-king. Serfoji was a voracious reader. He could read many languages and his printed collections include books in Latin, Greek, French, Italian and other languages. Not merely was he a linguist but he was immensely interested in many subjects. The wide variety of subjects with which his books and manuscripts deal, evidence his encyclopaedic mind. Among these printed books are rare first editions of highly-valued English books. Here are contemporary periodicals published in England, carefully bound and autographed by Serfoji, containing articles by great authors like Thackeray. Here are Lexicons and Grammar books in almost all European and Asiatic languages and illustrated books on many subjects and in many languages.

RARE PRINTED BOOKS OF RAJA SERFOJI

Serfoji's collection of pictures and photographs are equally remarkable. Beautiful views of scenes and situations in contemporary England, Europe and India, like pictures of London and European capitals, Himalayan views, and the like provide an excellent feast for the eye. The production of his own artists include some of the finest specimens of imitative art, namely faithful reproductions in natural colour, true to the minutest detail, of the rare birds reared by him, the fine breeds of his stable and the costume of his body-guard. His anatomical and botanical plates both prepared by foreign artists and his own men, still remain an excellent field for study and research.

PICTURES & PHOTOGRAPHERS

SERFOJI'S FALCON

THE TANJORE MAHARAJA SERFOJI'S SARASWATHI MAHAL LIBRARY + TANJORE +

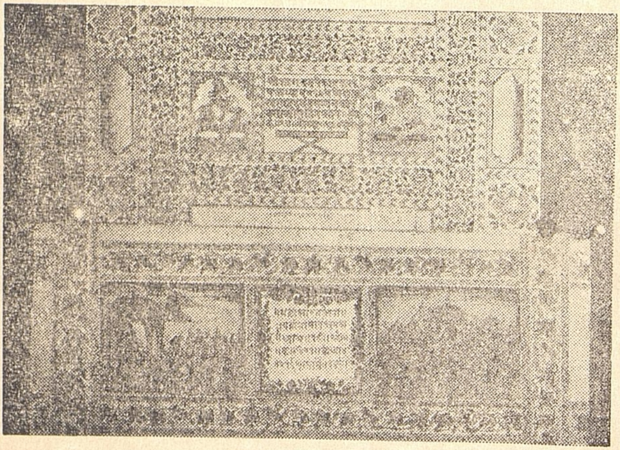
His books on the costume of different countries and his collections on military science and sports attract our attention.

But special mention must be made of a rare French work on Physiognomy in which human and animal faces are set forth side by side to indicate resemblance in character based on facial resemblance.

Passing from these printed books we come to the shelves on the Eastern row containing Marathi manuscripts. They are wrapped in curious textile specimens of those days, especially the famous Karuppur clothes, the product of the now decadent craft of lac-dyeing. These manuscripts deal with subjects like Philosophy, Literature, Music, Medicine and Science. In particular, we see here Marathi dramatic works composed by the Kings including Serfoji himself. We see here a quaint work in Geography called Devendra Koravanji, compiled in the form of songs sung by a wandering gipsy about various places in the world. The author of this work is Serfoji and it is said that he wrote it to serve as text-book for boys and girls in his schools.

MARATHI MANUSCRIPTS

Another remarkable series of manuscripts in this section are the illustrated paper manuscripts in Marathi language dealing with Mahabaratam and Bhagavatam. The wrapper of each of the bundles in this series is beautifully illustrated. For instance, the wrapper of each of the Mahabharatam bundles presents an important scene in the great story. These works are attributed to a great saint called Madhavaswami, a disciple and descendant



*(By Courtesy of the Director of Information, Madras.)*

*Above:* Parikshit and Shuka (Bhagavatha)
*Below:* Sri Krishna the charioteer (Bharata)

THE TANJORE MAHARAJAH SERFOGI'S SARASWATHI MAHAL LIBRARY + TANJORE +

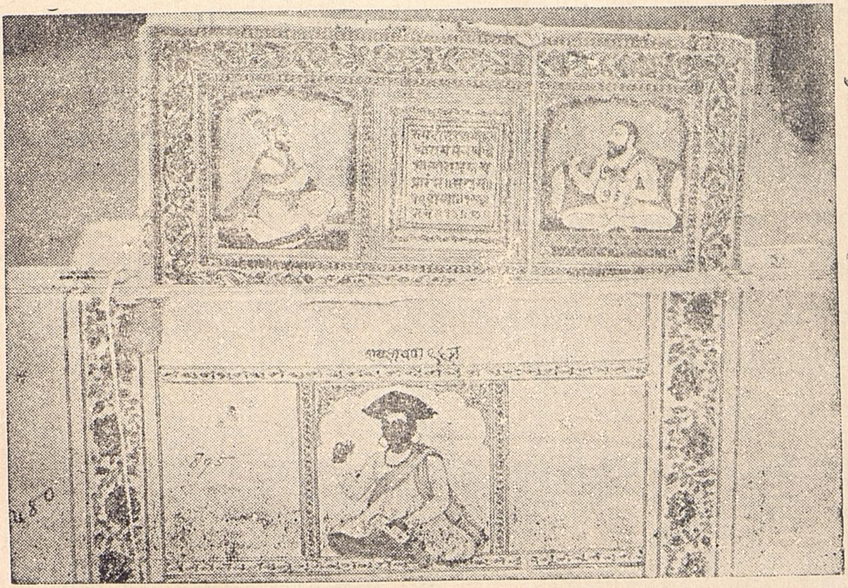
*Specimen pages from the French work of Physiognomy*

*Specimen page from the French work of Physiognomy*

of Ekanath, who lived near Mayuram. These illustrations were done nearly 250 years ago, but still we see the colour not only unfaded but fresh.

**THE TELUGU COLLECTIONS**

Then we come to the great Telugu collections. It is important to remember that Telugu did not suffer an eclipse at the disappearance of the Nayaks. Many of the Maratha Kings were great Telugu scholars and under them Telugu literature flourished. The result is that in this section we see the remarkable Telugu works not only left by the Nayaks, but also by the authors in the succeeding centuries. Telugu Kings like Raghunatha Nayak and Vijayaraghava Nayak, their talented queens like Ramabhadramba and Rangajamma, and their gifted advisers and poets, have left in this section works of lasting importance. Here are dramatic works which are famous as Yakshaganas and some of the operas of this period are even now staged in villages like Melattur in Tanjore district.



*(By Courtesy of the Director of Information Madras.)*

*Above :* Shivaji the great and his Guru, Ramadas Swami.

*Below :* Narayan Sudhi, the author of Sabda Bhushana.

EXPERIMENTS LINGUISTIC

We also find here linguistic experiments like Sanskrit works in Telugu scripts and Telugu works in Nagari and Tamil scripts, and Tamil works in both Telugu and Nagari scripts.

The Tamil school of Telugu literature, as it may be called came into existance here and its contribution to Telugu has now come to be recognised.

RARE TELUGU WORKS

Among Telugu works, special mention may be made of RAGHUNATHA NAYAKABHYUDAYAMU and KATTA-VARADARAJU'S RAMAYANAMU. In the former we get a glimpse of the Tanjore palace buildings more than 400 years ago, and we learn that the Punnai tree, standing outside the palace gates and the Saraswati Mahal, is nearly 400 years old, that the elephant stalls opposite the main entrance in the palace compound were there then, and that the Sangita Mahal which is now an object of wonder in acoustics existed from the early part of the 16th century.

Kattavaradaraju's Ramayanamu is to the Telugus what Kamba Ramayana is to the Tamils and Tulasidas Ramayana is to the Hindi-speaking world. The manuscript of this work, by its remarkable author Kattavaradaraju, is found only in this Library. Kattavaradaraju claims to be a descendant of the Cholas and it is an interesting fact that one of the greatest Telugu classics is by a Tamilian.

It must be mentioned here that King Shahji, the second Maratha ruler of Tanjore, was an inspired Musician and anticipated the great Thyagia by his sweet devotional Telugu songs of which more than five hundred are available now,

Next, we come to the Tamil manuscripts. Tamil flourished not only under the Cholas but also under the succeeding kings and it is no wonder that we find in this section some of the richest literary legacies, like rare commentaries on Tiruchitrambala Kovayar, Tiruvaimozhi, Naladiar, Perundevanar Bharatam and rare readings of the Kural. Each of them by itself is a literary find and the library has been able to publish a good many of them recently.

TAMIL MANUSCRIPTS

The Tamil section abounds in scientific and medical works like rare manuscripts on the methods of preparing chemicals, and Serfoji's medical manuscripts. The medical works of Serfoji, now famous as Sarabendra Vaidya Muraigal, are in eighteen volumes. It is not as well known as it should be that Raja Serfoji was running an institution in Tanjore called the Dhanvantari Mahal. Here he assembled leading physicians who carried on researches in Ayurvedic, Unani, Allopathic and Siddha systems of medicine and left the results of their researches in eighteen volumes, containing prescriptions for all ailments, which anticipate many of the modern discoveries relating to cures for such fell diseases as Cancer, Tuberculosis, Diabetes and some virulent forms of stomach ailments. Many of these recipes were tried in his time and found useful, and today when the library published some of these series, it was found that they were hailed as boons by physicians of all schools.

SCIENCE & MEDICINE

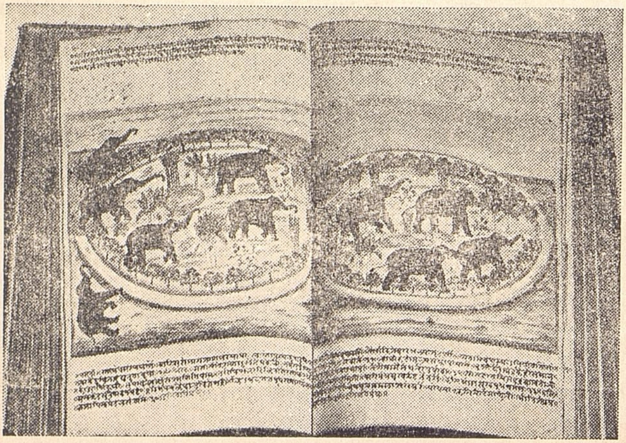
Roaming about in the Library we light on big bundles containing paper manuscripts written in a strange script. It is known as the MODI script and it was the official script in which all accounts were written up in the days of the Maratha kings of Tanjore. This script is still prevalent in Maharashtra but the

MODI MANUSCRIPTS

number of persons who know the script in the state of Madras is quite a handful. An account of the travels of Serfoji, up to Bezwada, is found in these manuscripts.

It now remains to turn our attention to the Sanskrit manuscripts in the Library. This is the biggest section of the Library. The variety and volume of these Sanskrit manuscripts make this Library the biggest Oriental Manuscripts Library in the world.

It is needless to say that the Saraswati Mahal is particularly important for the Sanskrit manuscripts it possesses. The Sanskrit manuscripts in the Library are unique in their volume and the range of subjects they cover. Rare works on Mantra Sastram and Vedic



*(By Courtesy of the Director of Information, Madras.)*

The Gedda for capturing Elephants.

scriptures, profound treatises on recondite and obstruse subjects, valuable works in medicine, music, science and fine arts enrich the archives of the library. These Sanskrit manuscripts are not merely by eminent classical authors but also by Kings of the Nayak and Maratha dynasties and by their distinguished subjects whose names are still remembered in these parts, like Govinda Dikshitar, Tryambakaraya Makhin and others. Those interested in Medicine

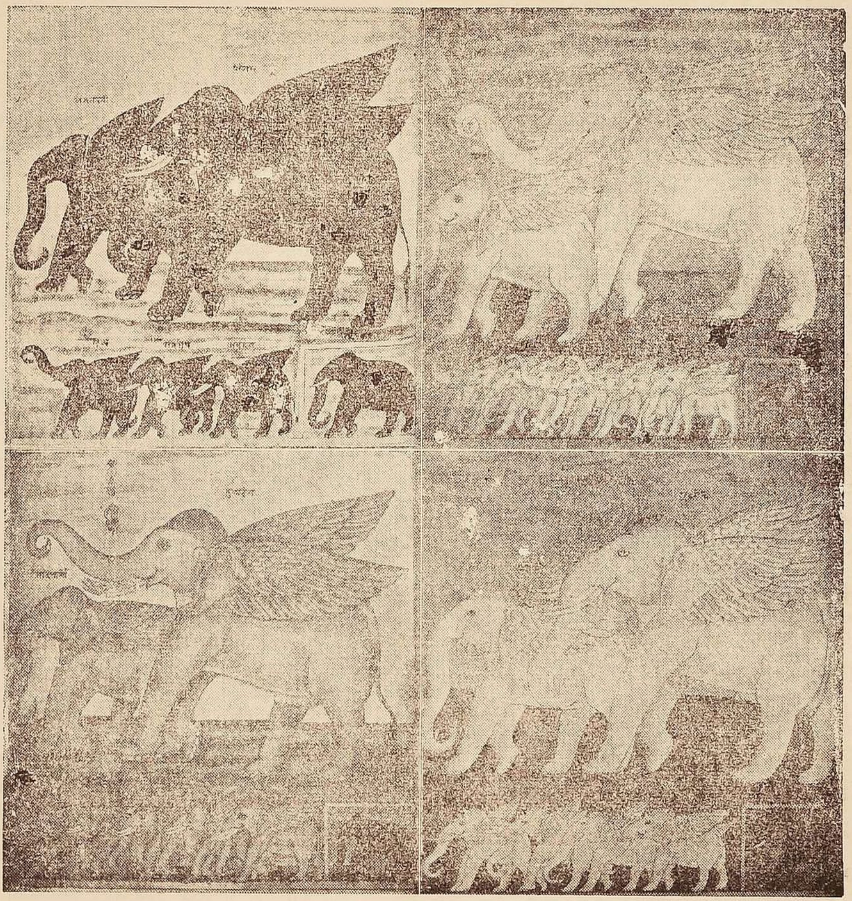
and Science find here a rare field for research. To mention only one instance, ANANDAKANDAM is a rare Sanskrit treatise on medicine and alchemy which also deals with atomic physics and some of the processes given here for dealing with the atom and transmuting metals are of lasting importance.

Special mention must be made of a few works which are seen and admired by scores of visitors everyday viz. the ASWASASTRAM, the GAJASASTRAM, and some microscopic writings. The first two are illustrated treatises on horses and Elephants. They tell us the biological origin of the animals, their peculiar physiological needs, their rearing, ailments and treatment. They are recognized as standard works on the subjects. In fact an American scholar has already made use of our manuscripts on elephants in his book entitled "Matanga Leela" or "Elephant lore of the Hindus." The Library has now printed the Aswasastram with selected illustrations. The beautiful pictures which these works contain are things of beauty and joy for ever. It may be thought that winged horses and elephants portrayed in these works are merely mythological and have no place in any scientific account about the animals. But it is interesting to know from scientists that biologically many big animals had wings in the beginning and came to shed them in course of time as the price of their evolution. It is equally Interesting to know that the elephants depicted in the GAJASASTRAM with two and three pairs of tusks are not mythological as considered by many, but real, and that an elephant with two pairs of tusks was actually shot recently in Belgian Congo.

ASWASASTRAM & GAJASASTRAM

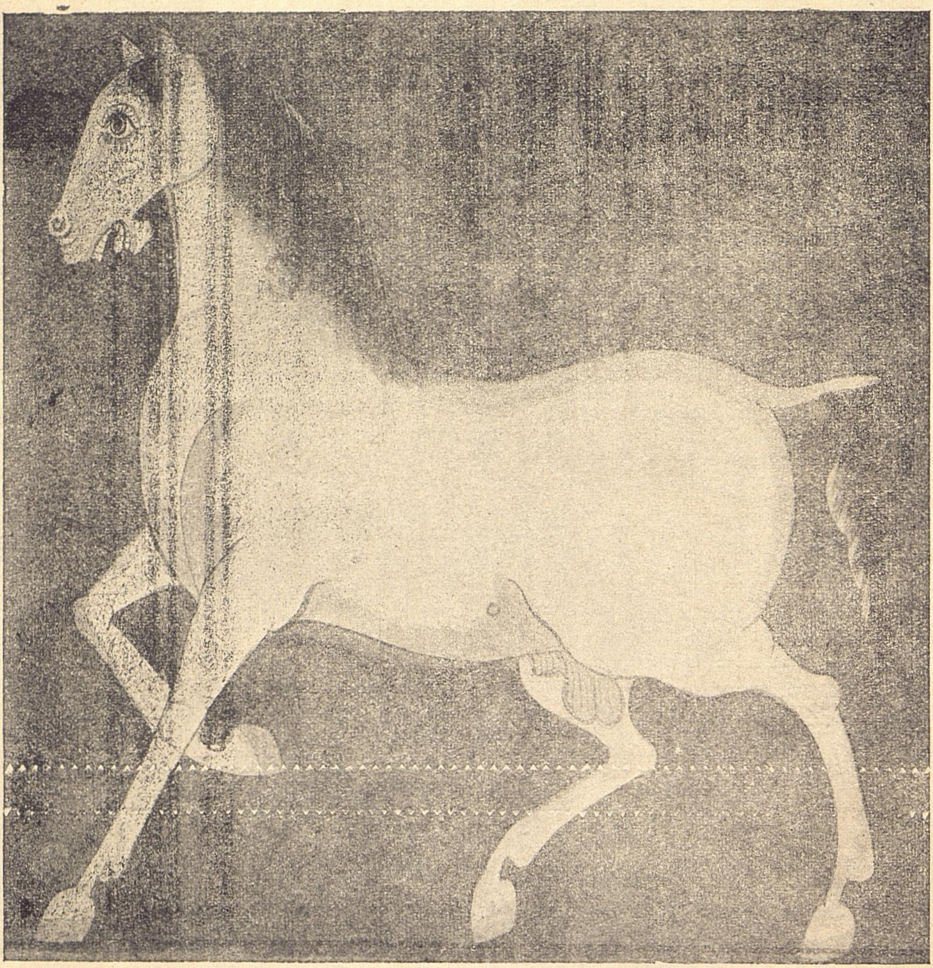
The microscopic writings provide a test for the keenest eyes. They are hardly visible cluster of letters, which can be discerned only through the lense. On seeing them, our minds at once go back with envy to those who could write them.

MICROSCOPIC WRITINGS

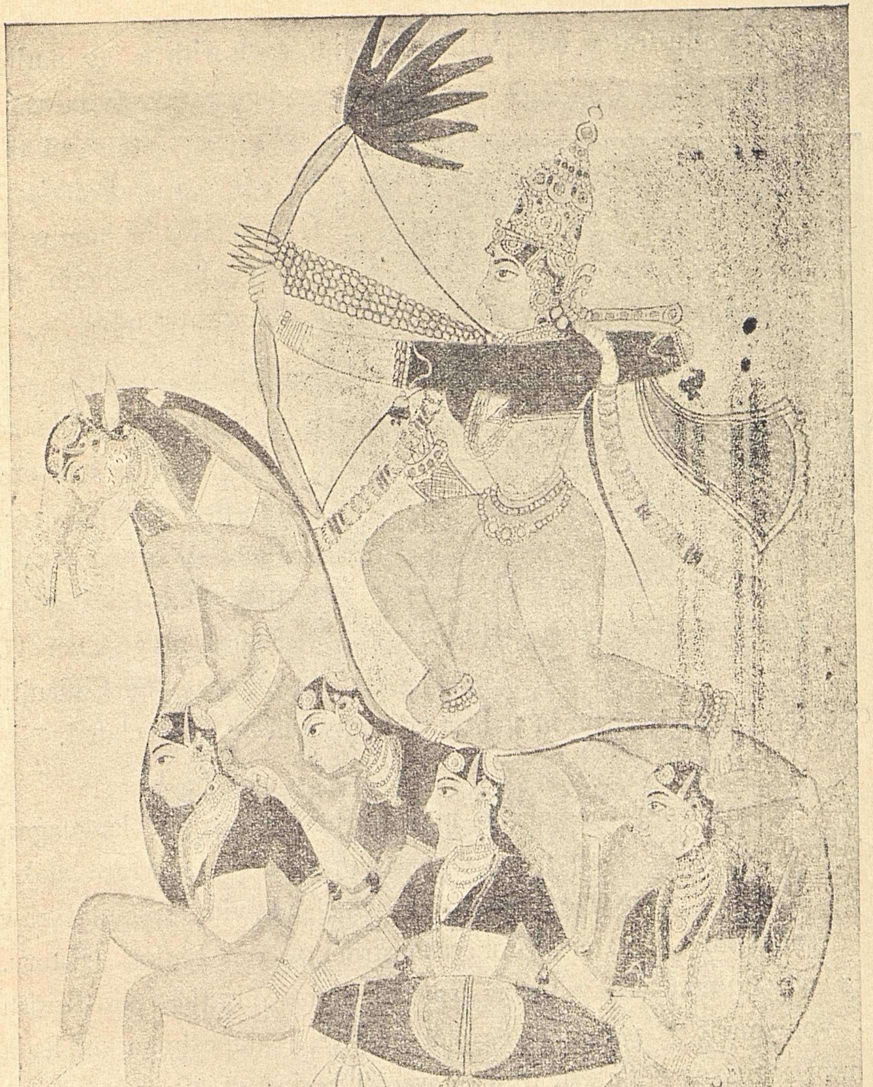


*Four out of the Eight original stocks of Elephants with three and two pairs of tusks.*

KING'S HORSE

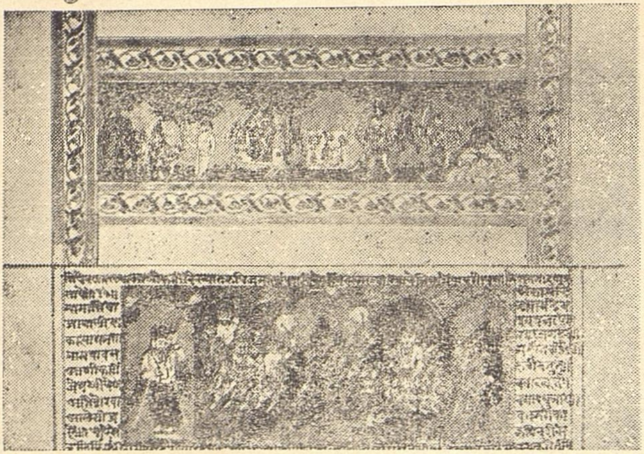


*Avarta Mark at Uparandhra*



*Rati on Horse made up of Damsels*

The illustrated RIG VEDA bundles, each with a fascinating illustration from each of the sections of the VEDAS and the fine specimen of handwriting they contain fill us with wonder.



(By Courtesy of the Director of Information, Madras.)

It is impossible to exhaust all that one has to say in this section. When it is said that our Sanskrit catalogues range over 20 volumes, the difficulty of doing justice to them in a short compass will be appreciated.

SPLENDID RAW MATERIAL FOR SOUTH INDIAN HISTORY

Apart from the above manuscripts in various languages, there are in this Library many manuscripts, papers and rare books, now out of print which provide splendid raw material for reconstruction of Indian History. They throw special light on the post-British period. The time of Raja Pratapasimha and Raja Tulaja, which covers a period of fifty years from the Seventeen thirties onwards happened to synchronise with some of the important events in South India, as for instance, the progress of the East India Company as a territorial power, the Maratha invasions under the Peshwas, the invasions by Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan and the clash between Tanjore and the Nawab of the Carnatic. Tanjore was the pivot of many of these events, especially the battles between the country powers and the English on one side and the French on the

other. The records available in this Library throw new light on many of these events enabling us to reconstruct our history and rescue old heroes and kings from oblivion in some cases and obloquy in others.

After our wanderings in the Library, if we sit here and pause to think over what we have seen, we seem to see about everything here the unseen personality of Maharaja Serfoji, who beckons to us across the centuries. The achievements of Serfoji are not in the field of battle. They were wholly cultural, literary and artistic. His freedom from political distraction, which he was obliged to purchase from the British at the price of his kingdom, enabled him to devote himself entirely to the arts of peace. Peace had her victories greater than war in his case and the Saraswati Mahal in Tanjore is one of her lasting victories.

Serfoji's interests in life were those of a myriad-minded genius. HIs studies and speculations covered a wide range as evidenced by the vast collection of manuscripts and books in the Saraswati Mahal on a wide variety of subjects. But he was not a mere intellectual dilettante. As already pointed out, he carried out experiments in Science and Medicine. Eighteen volumes of medical manuscripts produced by his Dhanvantari Mahal referred to already reflect the practical bent of his mind. He was a great educationist. He ran two educational institutions, in Tanjore, one to inculcate Western knowledge and the other to disseminate oriental learning. He himself wrote text-books. He set up the first printing press in Tanjore and used types hewn out of granite to print his works. His books printed in these granite types are still to be found in the Library. He was a great traveller and he saw nothing which he did not use to advantage when he returned home. Bishop Heber who saw him in Tanjore in 1826 and spent

some time with him in Saraswati Mahal has left a glowing account of the Scholar King. "I have seen many crowned heads", he recorded, "but no one whose deportment was more princely." Not merely his deportment but also his high intellectual attainments and encyclopædic knowledge greatly impressed those who saw him, as we are now impressed when we see the results of his labours.

There are many legends about Serfoji in Tanjore and the central theme of them all is his consuming passion for learning. One day when his finances were at a particularly low ebb, a man came from a distant place with a few valuable manuscripts. Serfoji was unwilling to lose them and he purchased them with his necklace. It is such precious manuscripts, purchased not with money but with priceless jewels by Serfoji, that make this Library unique in the world.

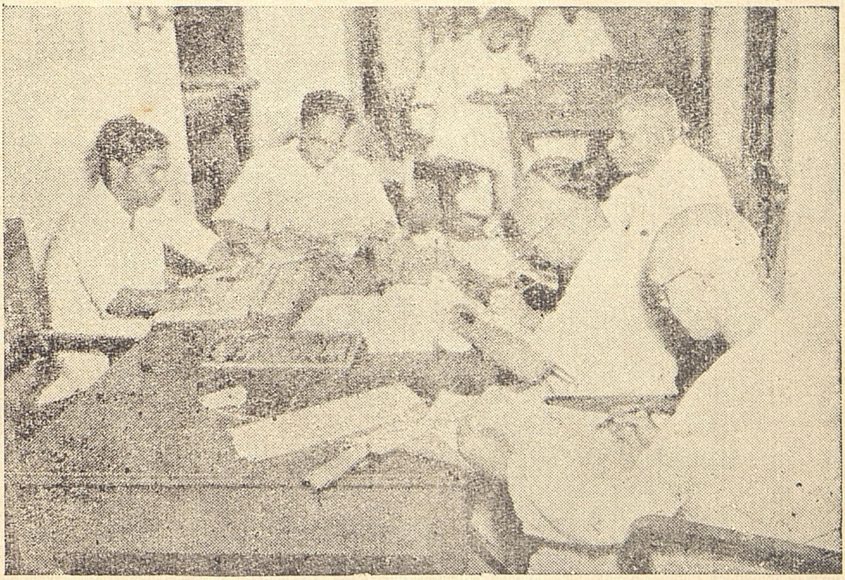
Is it not therefore appropriate that this Library is called the Tanjore Maharaja Serfoji's Saraswati Mahal Library? Never did a king leave a more lasting Kingdom behind.

Even after the extinction of the Maratha power, the descendants of Shivaji continued to take keen interest in the preservation and upkeep of the Library and but for their heroic efforts in this direction very little of the Library would have remained in 1918 when a committee was formed to take charge of it. At this time there was a litigation among the members of the royal family and naturally the palace library also came up for division among them. But all the parties to the litigation agreed to keep the Library out of the controversy and to provide one lakh of rupees as a nucleus for the upkeep of the Library. A consent decree was

passed by the Court constituting the Saraswati Mahal into a public trust to be administered by a commitee appointed by the Government of Madras.

The first Committee so appointed by Government started functioning in 1918 and, ever since, the administration of the Library has been carried on by them.

The annual income from the Endowment of one lakh could hardly suffice to meet the increasing needs of the Library and from



*(By Courtesy of the Director of Information, Madras.)*

Staff at work

1930 to 1936, the Library published its first catalogues in Sanskrit, Telugu, Marathi and Tamil with funds provided by Madras Government. The Library had to apply for financial assistance to the Government from time to time but not till the advent of the

National Government was it possible to get any substantial help. In 1947, the Madras Government came to evince keen interest in the manuscripts in the Saraswati Mahal and were pleased to sanction grants for the upkeep of the Library and also for copying and publishing the valuable manuscripts. A large number of valuable manuscripts in several languages and subjects has been already published by the library with funds provided by the Madras Government, and made available to the public ; but many more still remain to be copied and published ; and in fulfilling this great task, the Library stands in need of the continued support of the Madras and Union Governments.

APPENDIX

# A Short History of Tanjore

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THE CHOLA KINGS : KARIKAL CHOLAN

The first great Chola King known to recorded history is KARIKAL CHOLAN who ruled from A. D. 50 to A. D. 95. He was a statesman, warrior and engineer. He crushed the combined forces of the Panyda and Chera Kings in the battle of Koilvenny which lies about fifteen miles to the east of Tanjore. He built the great dam across the Cauveri and made Cauveri-poompattinam the port of call for the businessmen of the world. One of the literary works of his times, the Pattinappalai, gives a vivid idea of the prosperous state of industry and commerce in his time. The Silappadhikaram, another Tamil literary masterpiece, speaks of his expedition to the north and the subjugation of the Kings of Magadha, Avanti and other places.

He and his immediate successors including his sons are described as rulers of the "Sangam Age". Their period was productive of immortal works in Tamil.

VIJAYALAYA CHOLAN

About the fifth century, the Cholas suffered an eclipse. The Pallavas took their country and they throve as chieftains under them, until the middle of the ninth century when VIJAYALAYAN rose to prominence. He ruled from A. D. 850 to A. D. 871. It was he that wrested Tanjore from the Mutharayars. From him dates the history of Tanjore Cholas.

His son, ADITYAN distinguished himself in the battle of Sri Purambiam in which the Pandyas got a signal defeat from which they did not recover for a long time. He ruled till 907 and was succeeded by his son PARANTAKA I who ruled till 953, when again the Cholas came under a black-out. Their greatness was revived in A. D. 985 when anolher great Chola rose to power.

ADITYA CHOLAN

Who in the Tamil land has not heard of RAJARAJA CHOLA the Great? He is easily the greatest among the Cholas. By his victories he came to rule over the whole modern presidency of Madras, parts of Mysore and the island of Ceylon. During his time, art and literature, trade and commerce flourished. He sent many Naval expenditions conquering many islands comprising the Federated Malaya States, Indo-China and Burma.

RAJARAJA THE GREAT

The greatest of his achievements is the famous BRIHADEESWARA TEMPLE in Tanjore, popularly known as the BIG TEMPLE, which stands today, a colossal monument of his daring conception in architecture.

He ruled from A. D. 985 to A. D. 1014. His son RAJENDRA CHOLAN, who ruled from 1012 A. D. to 1044 A. D. was also among the greatest of the Cholas. He ruled over a bigger Empire than his father and in his time and in those of his sons and grandsons, Tanjore came to rule over a big overseas Empire. His territory extended into North India and hence he called himself GANGAIKONDA CHOLAN. He founded a new capital called GANGAIKONDACHOLAPURAM, outside the eastern borders of the Tanjore district. To signify his victories in Malaya then called KADARAM,

RAJENDRA CHOLAN

he named several villages as Kadaramkondan in various parts of Tiruchirapalli and Tanjore districts.

RAJENDRA'S SONS

He was succeeded by his warrior sons, RAJADHI RAJAN, RAJENDRA DEVAN and VEERARAJENDRAN whose reigns witnessed glorious naval victories and the consolidation of Chola power in islands like Ceylon, Malaya, Burma and other places.

FIRST KULOTHUNGAN

In 1070 the first KULOTHUNGAN, the first offspring of the alliance of the Chola with the eastern Chalukya came to power. He ruled over an extensive empire and established embassies in places like China, Kadaram and Sumatra. His son VIKRAMACHOLAN and his grandson KULOTHUNGAN II ruled till 1150 with conspicuous success. Their descendants held the empire till 1279 when the last Chola King Rajendra III died.

The Cholas were not merely fighters and seekers after territory. They encouraged arts and letters, and the literary achievements under them are of outstanding importance in Tamil literature.

NAYAK KINGS

Various chieftains calling themselves Cholas ruled in the South, until, about the end of the 14th century, the Vijayanagar Emperors, annexed Cholamandalam to their kingdom. They ruled Tanjore through Viceroys. One of the Viceroys appointed in 1532 by Emperor Achyuta was Sevappa Nayak, and he founded the dynasty of Tanjore Nayak Kings.

Sevappa Nayak who ruled till 1560 was a great builder and lover of art. His tolerance of other religions endeared him to

Mohammadans, Christians and Budhists, on all of whom he showered benefactions alike. It was during his time that the Portuguese first settled in Nagapattinam. He had an able counsellor in GOVINDA DIKSHITAR who was minister under his son Achyutappa Nayak and his son's son Raghunatha Nayak.

SEVAPPA NAYAK

Achyutappa ruled from 1560 to 1600. He was a man of keen intellect and quick decision. He had to fight the Muslims and the Portuguese. He interfered in the quarrels between the Kings of Jaffna and the Portuguese who were ruling over Ceylon and gave shelter in his court to the Jaffna King when he was driven out by the Portuguese.

ACHYUTAPPA NAYAK

He was succeeded by his talented son, Raghunatha Nayak who ruled from 1600 to 1634. He was easily the greatest of the Nayak rulers of Tanjore. Under his reign Tanjore became a great centre of learning, art and culture and the home of Carnatic Music. He was himself a gifted writer and a musician and some of his writings are in the Saraswati Mahal. His own queens were talented authoresses. Among the poets of his time, the name of RAMABHADRAMBA, RANGAJAMMA, GOVINDA DIKSHITAR and YAGYANARAYANA DIKSHITAR are still remembered and their works are in the archives of the Saraswati Mahal.

RAGHUNATHA NAYAK

Raghunatha was also a great warrior. He crushed the Madura and Gingee rulers in the battle of Toppur. Fighting with him in this battle was the grand-father of the talented author of the Telugu Ramayana, Kattavaradarajalu,

Raghunatha crossed over to Ceylon and drove the Portuguese out of Jaffna and restored the throne to the refugee King in his court.

Pathetic interest surrounds the time of the last Nayak ruler Vijayaraghava, the son of Raghunatha, who ruled from 1634 to 1673. In his time, Tanjore was repeatedly attacked by the Madura King on the one side and the Sultan of Bijapur on the other. From 1653 to 1659, Tanjore remained in subjection to Bijapur. Vijayaraghava had to flee from his palace. But two unexpected forces came to his rescue. First, a hideous famine broke out in 1659 and forced the muslim hordes to run away from Tanjore. Secondly a valiant army of Kallars, operating from and near Vallam, routed the invaders and dislodged them from their fortification in Vallam.

VIJAYA-RAGHAVA

But the fate of the Nayaks was sealed and nothing could save them. Trouble broke out in 1673. Chokkanatha Nayak, King of Madura, attacked Tanjore. Vijayaraghava and his son Mannarudas, a talented prince, both fell in the field fighting to the last. Before they left for the fight they caused the whole Zenana in the Palace to be burnt.

A word has to be said about Prince Mannarudas. He was a gifted writer. But he incurred his father's wrath by making love to the minister's daughter. The king flung him into prison for this offence and released him only to accompany him to the last battle in which they both fell. But the prince, while in jail, completed one of his famous works "VIJAYARAGHAVA-BHYUDAYAMU."

It was during the time of the Nayaks that the Portuguese, the Danes and the English first settled in the South. This laid the foundation for the future subjection of India to the foreign powers. These European traders and the missionaries who came with them have left us accounts of the time of the Nayaks which are of great use to us in sizing up their achievements. A contemporary letter by a foreigner gives a vivid description of Tanjore in the middle of the 17th century under the Nayaks when it was attacked by the Muslims. It was found to be a prosperous town situated in fertile plain "not inferior to the strong citadels of Europe, defended by strong artillery; and numerous troops provisioned for several years could defy the besiegers who had not a single cannon."

There is a legend that the last Nayak King Vijayaraghava adopted a puerile stratagem to stem an invasion. He is said to have kept the streets strewn with TULASI (sacred leaves) leaves thinking that no one would step on the sacred leaves. It is also said that the invader walked over the soft road to the place greatly pleased with the soft pavement provided for him. This story is also attributed to one of the Maratha Kings. But the story is not true of either. The last Nayak King Vijayaraghava was no doubt a weakling. He fled from his Kingdom twice. He became a vassal of the Bijapur Sultan. But he retrieved his name by the last gallant fight which he put up against the Madura King. Nor could it be said of any of the Maratha rulers who were known for their valour.

After Vijayaraghava, Tanjore was annexed to Madura kingdom and Chokkanatha left his brother Alagiri Nayak in charge of Tanjore, in 1673. During Alagiri's rule, one of his counsellors, Rayasam Venkanna, was greatly dissatisfied with him and set up a child of VIJAYARAGHAVA as a rival to

the throne. The child, Sengamaladas, was smuggled out of the burning Zenana by a foster mother and brought up in secret in NAGAPATTINAM in the house of a merchant. Venkanna invoked the help of the Sultan of Bijapur on behalf of Sengamaladas. The Sultan sent an army to Tanjore under the lead of Venkoji alias Ekoji. Ekoji defeated Chokkanatha Nayak in the battle of Ayyampet and placed the child Sengamaladas on the throne in the year 1674.

ALAGIRI'S RULE

But hardly had Sengamaladas sat on the throne when his foster mother helped by the merchant began to quarrel with Rayasam Venkanna. The hands that rocked the cradle now wanted to guide the sceptre. Rayasam Venkanna not willing to submit to her domination sought the aid of Ekoji, who was now returning after his victorious campaign. Ekoji rushed back on his invitatlon and occupied Tanjore without firing a single shot, as the young king had flewn to Ariyalur and there was none to resist him. Thus began the Maratha rule of Tanjore.

THE MARATHA KINGS: EKOJI ALIAS VENKOJI

Ekoji ruled from 1676 to 1683. He was an adventurous warrior. But once he settled in Tanjore, he directed his mind to consolidate his kingdom and to found a Maratha line of his own. His distinguished brother Shivaji the Great, was now at the zenith of his power in the north and was keenly ambitious to establish a Maratha hegemony under him inclusive of the South. But Ekoji obviously thought that the fruition of his brother's dream would spell the end of his independence and would not co-operate with him.

Ekoji established order and peace in the Tanjore kingdom and made it prosperous by promoting and encouraging agriculture.

*Ekoji (1674 - 1683) - Shahji (1684 - 1710) - Serfoji (1711 - 1724)*

At the same time he had to fight against hostile powers like Madura and Mysore who wanted to swallow Tanjore. In spite of all his distractions, he found time to encourage arts and letters. Sanskrit and Telugu flourished under him. A Telugu work entitled KAMAKALANIDHI, attributed to Shivaramakavi, a contemporary of Ekoji, deals with the King's heroism in saving the fort of Tiruchirapalli from the forces of Mysore.

Ekoji was sufficiently wise to retire and let his sons rule while he was still alive to guide them. He had three sons, Shahji, Serfoji and Tukoji and all the three are said to have jointly ruled, the first at Tanjore, the second at Sakkottai, near Kumbakonam and the third near Mahadevipattinam near Mannargudi.

Shahji ruled from 1684 to 1712. He was learned, precocious and brilliant. Aided by his father's able ministers, he distinguished himself both in war and in administration. He himself led an expedition to Gingee, and helped Rajaram Raja, son of Shivaji the Great, to drive out the Moguls who had besieged Gingee, but later he had to pay for this by suffering three attacks on Tanjore by the Mogul leader Zulfekar ali Khan whom he had to purchase with a large tribute.

SHAHJI

Shahji was also a great scholar and linguist and his period witnessed a rich harvest in Sanskrit and Telugu literatures. Many of the works of his period still adorn the shelves of the Saraswati Mahal. His minister Triambaka Raya Makhi was the son of Ekoji's minister Gangadhara Makhi and is the distinguished author of the great Sanskrit work DHARMAKUTAM, a rare encyclopædic commentary on the Ramayana. The Maharashtra Durbar Hall is said to have been constructed by him. He built hospitals, choultries and rest-houses throughout the land. He was a pious devotee of God Thyagaraja of Tiruvarur and it is

said that he took his midddday meal only after the performance of Pooja to his Deity at Tiruvarur, which was relayed to him by a series of bells.

Shahji created a literary settlement by gifting a whole village to his literary men and settling them there. This village originally called Tiruvisanallur was now christened Shahjirajapuram and forty of the King's Pandits lived and worked there.

One of them, Venkatakrishna Dikshitar, the author of NATESA VILASAM, UTTARACHAMPU and other works was also eagerly sought after by the Kings of Tiruchirappalli and Gingee. Shahji himself was a poet and musician. His collections of manuscripts on the theory and practice of Carnatic music is a veritable mine of information for research in Carnatic music.

After Shahji, his brother Serfoji and Tukkoji ruled together. Serfoji ruled from 1712 to 1728. He was a daring warrior and subdued the chieftain of Ramanadapuram as well as the Nayak of Madura. It was he that created the Zamindari of Sivaganga. In 1725, he had to repulse the forces of Nizam with the help of Shahu, the Maratha ruler at Satara.

SERFOJI AND TUKKOJI

He had no issue and the attempt of one of his queens to foist a son on him was exposed in time and the child, really the son of a washer-woman, is said to have been killed; but this did not prevent pretenders coming up later on, claiming to be this son.

Tukkoji alias Tulajaji I succeeded his brother in 1728. He had trouble at the hands of Chandasaheb, who was in Tiruchirapalli and had to make peace with the Nizam. He helped the famous queen Meenakshi of Madura against Chandasaheb. But

he could not prevent the extinction of the Hindu Kingdom of Madura by the Muslims. Like his predecessors, he was a scholar and linguist and lover of fine arts. He introduced Hindustani music into Tanjore. His musical work, Sangita Saramritam, reveals his highly cultivated musical taste. His talented minister Ghanasyam was a voluminous writer and wrote no less than 64 poetical works. Sundari and Kamala, the wives of Ghanasyam, were also gifted writers.

It was in his time that the temple of Mariamman, three miles East of Tanjore, was built and consecrated by his Guru Sadasiva Brahmendra.

EKOJI ALIAS BABA SAHEB

His son Ekoji alias Baba Saheb ruled for a year from 1736. He was greatly harassed by internal dissensions which were exploited by an adventurer called Syed, the father-in-law of Chandasaheb who later came to be known as the Kingmaker. Ekoji alias Baba Saheb died leaving a minor son called Pratap. His queen Sujana Bai, succeeded him for a short time. Syed soon became very powerful and the Nizam began to influence affairs in Tanjore through him. Intriques plagued the court of the queen. In 1773, a pretender called Kattu Raja, was set up as a rival to the throne. Syed pretended that Kattu Raja was the child of Serfoji, and succeeded in placing him on the throne. Sujana Bai was cruelly put to death. There is a tradition that she was placed in a wall-almirah with all her jewels and plasted over. The pretender ruled for a short time with the help of Syed and Chandasaheb but ultimately Chandasaheb declared him an impostor.

SUJANA BAI

KATTU RAJAH THE PRETENDER

After him Pratap Singh, son of Tukkoji ascended the throne in 1739. It is said that he was requested by leading citizens in Tanjore to assume leadership. He was the last of the Great Maratha rulers of Tanjore and was both a warrior and a scholar. He succeeded in stemming the tide of Mohammaden influence, put an end to Syed and rescued Hindu art and temples from the ravages of the invaders. With the help of the Maratha ruler in Satara he defeated the Nawab of the Carnatic and imprisoned Chandasaheb. He had to face trouble from the English and the French who by turns played off the claim of the pretender Kattu Raja to the throne. Pratap purchased the English with the session of Devikottai, but when the French took up the cause of the pretender, Pratap with the help of Manoji, his commander-in-chief, fought them out and defeated them.

Pratap had also to fight against the Nawab of the Carnatic who led several expeditions against Tanjore. The Raja was successful in most of the campaigns, but unfortuately the English backed up the forces of the Nawab, and the Raja had to pay a heavy tribute to the Nizam. At that time Tanjore was the cockpit of the Carnatic wars, and Pratap Singh and his military commanders were fully occupied with them.

Pratap Singh died in 1763 full of years and honours and his son Tulajaji the second, succeeded him and ruled till 1787.

THULAJA II

Tulajaji was a very learned man and knew several languages. He patronised arts and letters. But in his time the influence of the British in Tanjore affairs was becoming more and more pronounced. The Nawab of the Carnatic would not be content with anything less than the annexation of Tanjore to his territory. The combined forces of the East India Company and the Nawab attacked and took Tanjore in 1773, and Tanjore was under Muslim rule till 1776.

when the Court of Directors in England questioned the conduct of the East India Company at Madras in acting against Tulajaji, their friend and ally, and finally restored the Maratha King to the throne. After his restoration, Tanjore fell very much under the power of the English. His last days were clouded by domestic calamities. His children died one by one and in his old age, he took in adoption a boy from a collateral branch. He was christened Serfoji.

As Serfoji was too young, Amar Singh, Pratap's son by a sword-wife, became regent as desired by Tulaja Raja. But shortly after the King's death Amar Singh began to plot against Serfoji, and with the help of the East India Company became the ruler himself. Amar Singh ruled from 1786 to 1798. He is said to have ill-treated the young boy entrusted to him by Tulajaji. But for the timely rescue of Serfoji by Schwartz, the Danish Missionary, Serfoji would have fallen a prey to the machinations of Amar Singh.

AMAR SINGH

As Amar Singh ousted Serfoji on the ground that his adoption was invalid, Schwartz studied hard to find out the truth from the scriptures and ultimately induced the English to decide that the adoption was perfectly valid.

Except for his treatment of Serfoji, Amar Singh is said to have been a good ruler and also liked by his people. But a black record exists against him as he consistently fought against the growing influence of the English.

Serfoji ascended the throne in 1798, after making a treaty with the English surrendering the administration of his kingdom

into the hands of the company. Serfoji had the unique advantage of having had an able tutor in Schwartz who taught him European languages and also appointed the best local pandits for imparting him instruction in Marathi and Sanskrit. Serfoji became a great scholar and a multi-linguist, and contemporary accounts left by distinguished men like Bishop Heber and Valentia speak volumes about his erudition, all-round equipment and encyclopædic knowledge. Having resigned the administration into the hands of the British, Serfoji devoted all his time and energy to learning and experiments in Science and Music and researches in Medicine.

SERFOJI

His work in building up the Saraswati Mahal is dealt with in another place in this account. It is no exaggeration to say that the Saraswati Mahal owes its existence in its present form to his great sacrifice and far-sighted vision. He died in 1832.

His son Shivaji was the last of the Maratha rulers of Tanjore. He too was a scholar and a linguist and patron of music and encouraged men of learning in his court. His love of learning was such that out of a total annual expenditure of Rs. 1,45,439 for the year 1849 as much as Rs. 21,589 were spent on the upkeep of the Saraswati Mahal. On his death in 1855, Tanjore lapsed to the British Government.

SHIVAJI

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